

FORT HOOD, Texas—Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center's Sexual Assault Medical Forensic Exam (SAMFE) Program reached its first year milestone in helping those who have suffered a sexual assault.

The program, which began here in September 2014, provides exams to beneficiaries 14 years and older who come to CRDAMC's Emergency Department seeking medical assistance after a sexual assault. Before the program was initiated at CRDAMC, sexual assault patients would have to travel to Baylor Scott & White in Temple for the forensic examination.

"The most important thing victims of a sexual assault can do is seek medical care. Even if they do not have any visible physical injuries, they may be at risk of acquiring a sexually transmitted disease or becoming pregnant," said Sheilah Priori, SAMFE program manager. "It's also important to have the sexual assault forensic examination which allows us to collect and preserve evidence."

Potential evidence can be collected up to a week after a sexual assault, according to Priori, and it is not uncommon for many patients to seek medical care 24-48 hours after an assault has occurred.

Many of those who have suffered from sexual assault find it difficult to report the crime to authorities. Service members who have been sexually assaulted can choose to file an unrestricted report with law enforcement, or to file a restricted report only to specifically identified individuals without triggering the official investigative process.

Restricted reporting also allows service members to make a decision to report the crime to law enforcement officials at a later time. The forensic exam ensures that victims can change their minds about reporting without losing potential evidence, according to Priori.

The need for sexual assault forensic examinations is recognized across the country. Per legislation passed in 2013, any hospital with an emergency room must have physicians and nurses trained in a basic level of forensic evidence collection.

"The success of CRDAMC's sexual assault program comes at a time when several hospitals throughout the state struggle to organize designated facilities providing certified sexual assault examiners," Priori said, adding that the current two-hour continuing education standard is far less rigorous than that required for the Military Sexual Assault Examiners and the guidelines outlined in the National Defense Authorization Act.

"A SAMFE team is comprised of a medical director, program manager and registered nurses specially trained in performing sexual assault exams operating out of the emergency department. Our training and

certification program incorporates and reflects the best practices and standards on sexual assault forensic examinations,” she said. “We provide responsive and reliable care to community members 24/7.”

All victims of sexual assault at CRDAMC are offered behavioral health counseling, follow-up medical care, advocacy and special victim counsel providing legal assistance as needed through the entire duration of their case.